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INTELLIGENCE NOTE

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TUNISIAN SECURITY FEARS

In recently requesting security equipment from the US, Tunisian authorities claimed they faced growing internal and external threats in which Algeria and Libya figure prominently. These allegations appear exaggerated.

Internal Threat Probably Minimal. Tunisia has long been considered a model of stability in the Third World. Since 1955 serious internal threats have arisen only twice: during the pre-independence period (1955-1956) when nationalist leader Salah Ben Youssef declared armed insurrection against his former ally, Habib Bourguiba; and later, in 1962, when a group of disgruntled military officers and civilians plotted to assassinate President Bourguiba. In both cases the government squelched the threats with a minimum of disruption.

Today a serious threat from within is probably remote, despite the activities of a few plotters in exile. Ibrahim Tobal, former secretary to Salah Ben Youssef, is the most notable of these. Tobal has found asylum in Algiers, where he has collected an Algerian government subsidy in exchange for performing varied tasks for Sonatrach, the Algerian national oil and gas company. He may be considered the leader of what remains of the Youssefist opposition, although his several years outside the country

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have probably weakened his links with the interior.

Another dissident group consists of Baathists. Amor Sehim, former Paris-based chief of the Tunisian Baathists, was assassinated in Beirut on October 7, 1971, apparently on his way to Baghdad. A disagreement with his Iraqi sponsors, reportedly over finances, had led to an open break. Sehim is also known to have had some contacts with South Yemeni officials and Libyans. Sehim's major contact within Tunisia was said to be Mohamed Messaoud Chabi, a former leftist student who visited the US in 1964. The leadership of the external Baathist organization apparently has fallen on Abdessatar Aleya el Keffi, a former Tunisian student in Iraq and Iran now residing in Paris. What little is known of the internal Youssefist and Baathist organizations indicates they possess limited, if any, means for effective subversion.

The Tunisian military establishment has been almost completely apolitical in the past. While there may be a trend away from this, we have seen no indications of subversive plotting. We know very little about the current political attitudes of Tunisian military officers, particularly the younger ones. Given the present transition to a post-Bourguiba era and the propensity of African and Arab armies to assume leadership in times of stress, however, future involvement by the Tunisian military should not be completely discounted.

Tunisian students have been relatively troublesome, but they remain divided over a wide spectrum of ideologies, ranging from Arab nationalism

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to Maoism, and have been largely neutralized by a subtle combination of government repression and response. Tunisian students in France, while susceptible to the radical ideologies of the French left, have not demonstrated the means to become a threat to the regime.

The strong showing of the liberal faction of the ruling Destourian Socialist Party during the recent Eighth Party Congress brought into the open a challenge to the conservative and personalized rule of President Bourguiba. This challenge, coming at a crucial phase of transition to the post-Bourguiba era, may well herald the end of consensus politics, which since independence has shown great resiliency in accommodating dissent within the Party. The present calm following the Congress shows, however, that the system still has flexibility.

Algerian-Tunisian Relations Warming. Mutual distrust between Algeria and Tunisia, exacerbated by a border dispute in the oil-rich El Borma area, has progressively evaporated since early 1969. The two governments signed a treaty of friendship in January 1970, and agreed to a border settlement that put bilateral relations on a new and positive footing. The removal of major points of contention and Algeria's preoccupation with internal economic development have tended to aid this trend. President Bourguiba, who has an outstanding invitation to visit Algeria, recently praised closing Algerian-Tunisian relations. The Tunisian Foreign Minister is about to visit Algiers.

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While Tunisian dissident Tobal still resides in Algiers, the Algerian government has recently accused him of working for Egypt and deprived him of his subsidy. The Tunisians hardly have grounds for protest about Tobal, since they have allowed Tahar Zibiri, the arch-enemy of Algerian President Houari Boumediene, to live in Tunis since shortly after Zibiri's abortive coup attempt in December 1967.

Détente Continues in Libyan-Tunisian Relations. Relations between Libya and Tunisia have gradually improved, albeit unevenly, since the low point following the successful coup of September 1969 in Libya. A lingering undercurrent of mutual suspicion remains, nevertheless, although Prime Minister Muammar Qadhafi made a good impression on his Tunisian hosts when he visited in February 1971. Economic relations also have improved considerably, and the two countries have given each other some diplomatic support. On the other hand, Libya's quick offer of help to the Moroccan officers who tried to revolt in July 1971 indicated to the Tunisians that they too might become the target of a Libyan interventionist policy. Active Libyan support for insurgents in Eritrea and in Chad, and for the Palestine fedaveen and the Libyan moves in support of Sudanese President Jaafar Nimairi during his counter-coup in July, have lent some credence to this fear.

Libya gave Tunisian exile Tobal some financial aid before he supposedly fell from favor with Qadhafi, and some unidentified Tunisian dissidents are said to be living in Tripoli. In addition, the Libyans

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probably fear the possible use of Tunisian territory by certain Libyan exiles actively plotting against them.

Despite mutual suspicion and a certain potential for future trouble over problems like an undefined sea frontier in the area of a recent oil discovery, both Tunisian and Libyan leadership seem to desire to keep relations on an even keel.

INR/Africa
Director: *LMRives*
Analyst : *HHoffman*
Ext. : *22297*
Released by: *juul*

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